

WOMEN / WARRIORS: DUAL IMAGES IN MODERN THAI LITERATURE

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Abstract

This paper aims at studying the image of women in modern Thai literature, with emphasis on analyses of the image of woman and the image of warrior. The main concept is that the two images, which seem contradictory, have usually appeared together in Thai literature in the past as well as today. One image is oftentimes obvious while the other is underlying. Women in Thai literature is, thus, present dual images, while the image of the ideal women emphasizes womanhood which is inferior in status to manhood in all respects.

This study makes use of the didactic, religious literature of the past as an introduction to the image of the ideal woman in Thai society. It will then move to historical documents to explore the image of historical heroines. The main focus of this paper will be the analyses of some popular novels and short stories in order to discuss the dual images of women in these particular literary genres. Novels and short stories are, apart from their great capability in recording social phenomena, movements, and changes, the genres with the greatest influence on the value system of society. Also, novels and short stories are to a certain extent a continuation of traditional narrative literature, e.g. tales,

myth and so on, which had great influence in Thai society before Westernization.

The study focuses on four novels: *Chanhom* by Wasit Detkunchon, *A Woman Named Bunrot* by Botan, *Khu Kam* by Thamayanti, and *Nuea Nang* by Krisna Asoksin, and two short stories: *The Fifth Train Trip* by Atsiri Thammachot and *A Pot Stained Beyond Scraping* by Anchan.

Introduction

*Rocking the cradle, and wielding
the sword, aren't they efficient?
Without bragging, Thai women
shouldn't be underestimated.*

This line, one of the most popular sayings about Thai women, is from a poem written in praise of a brave deed of a heroine in the early Bangkok period.² It is as if it were the 'blue print' of the expected role of women. Its meaning is simple and clear; namely, that Thai women can simultaneously take on a double image: the image of mother and the image of warrior. The question is whether this dual image of women is true and acceptable in Thai society, or whether it is only a concept expressed through an impression in this exceptional case?

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² This poem, "Poem in Praise of the People of Nakhon Ratchasima" by Phraya Uppakitsilpasan, tells of the rebellion of King Anu of Vientiane in Laos, during the reign of King Rama III.

Ideal Woman / Ideal Wife

The *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*³ (The Three Worlds of King Ruang), a venerable and famous literary work of the Sukhothai Period which has had a very strong influence upon Thai ideology and the Thai system of belief, describes the ideal woman with particular clarity in the part on the Sri Ariya Maitriya Age --the Buddhist Utopia.⁴ It goes as follows:

The [ideal] woman keeps the eternal beauty of a sixteen-year-old girl. She has a very beautiful slim body and a lovely. She is neither very tall nor very short. Her complexion is fair, neither too dark nor too white. Her waist, thighs, and breasts are lovely. Her fingers are plumb. Her face resembles the full moon. Her eyes are black with thick lashes, soft, large and as pleasing as the eyes of the new-born fawn. Her hair is soft and shines like silk.

When the [ideal] woman gives birth to a child, she does not have to feed it. She lays the child beside a path and it is fed by people who pass by. Both men and women feed the child with milk which flows from their fingers. When the child grows up, it will stay with other children in a group of the same sex. The children will not know their parents.

What this passage tells us of the ideal woman is very interesting. First, the ideal woman must have perfect and eternal beauty. Second, the major role of woman is to give birth to a child, that is, the role of the mother. But the mother need not care for her baby. Moreover, the child will not know its parents. This means there is no relationship between mother and child required in the ideal society. Thus, the role of the mother in this case is concerned only with the physical, the biological aspect—not with the cultural. In other words, the image of the mother is almost absolutely ignored in this famous and influential literary work. The ideal wife is then depicted as follows:

Her previous lives of merit and glory will contribute to her husband's prosperity. She will have been born to provide her husband with prosperity or to contribute to her husband's life. She will gain people's respect and will thus win her husband's respect, a reward for her goodness. She will be installed as Nang Kaeo [precious object, ideal wife]. Besides

³ *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, or the Three Worlds of King Ruang, was written by King Lithai of the Sukhothai Kingdom (Mahathammaracha I, 1346-47-1368-74?) This book is very well-known, not only as a treatise on Buddhist cosmology, but also as a description of the ideal Buddhist monarch and the principles of good government.

⁴ The third part of *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*, describes the whole world in the Age of Sri Ariya Maitriya (the last Buddha, who will follow Sakaya Khotama, the Buddha of the present age). Buddhists believe that everyone will be happy and all will be equal in that age, when there will be no suffering and no pain.

her merit and glory, she is a perfect housewife, who takes care of her husband and satisfies him. She is subservient, obedient, and faithful to him. She entertains her husband whenever he wants.

It is clearly stated that the ideal wife must be inferior to her husband. The relationship between husband and wife is thus that between a superior and an inferior. Even her life, her merit and glory are not for herself but for her husband.

Given such a concept, how can the image of the warrior be developed? Ideal woman need not fight against anything since she can depend on her husband in every aspect of life. And she must depend on him, clinging to him like a slave, no matter what the situation is.

In another literary work, inspired by characters in the Indian epic *Maha Bharata*, *Krisna Son Nong*⁵ (The Teaching of Krisna to Her Sister), Krisna, the wife who was successful in serving five husbands, teaches her sister, who had only one husband but was unable to satisfy him, that;

A wife must get up before her husband in the morning, go to bed after him at night, speak to him sweetly at all

⁵*Krisna Son Nong* (The Teaching of Krisna to Her Sister), a didactic poem written by the Supreme Patriarch Prince Paramanuchitchinorot (1790-18) is based on one episode of the *Maha Bharata*; however, the ethical concepts related to women are Thai, with an admixture of some Hindu concepts.

times, honour all those whom he honours, and comply with his wishes in all things.

Again, an absolutely dependent relationship is described. So also in another famous Buddhist literary work *Vessantara Jataka*,⁶ in which Madhi, the wife of Vessantara, the Buddha-to-be, concludes that,

"to have a husband is like having a precious tiers over your head. The tiers will make you look beautiful and glorious at all time."

All these religious literary works present an image of the wife as inferior to and dependent on her husband and as loyal to the husband as a slave is loyal to its master. This image is found not only in religious works, but also in the law, *The Three Seals Law*⁷ enacted by King Rama I, the first king of the Bangkok Period, the wife is controlled absolutely by her husband, who has the right to take more than one wife. Wives are classified into three categories, legitimizing and institutionalizing polygamy, as follows:

⁶*Vessantara Jataka*, the most well-known jataka, which tells of the penultimate life of Buddha, has as its dominant theme the virtue of Dana (Giving), which means generosity or charity. This virtue is praised as the most meritorious among the ten virtues. In Thailand, this jataka is usually called *Maha Chat*, or the Great Birth.

⁷*The Three Seals Law* (in Thai, *Kotmai Tra Sam Duang*), the first Siamese legal code, was promulgated in 1805 by King Rama I, who had appointed a commission of judges and scholars to examine, revise, and edit the entire corpus of Siamese law handed down from the Ayuddhya Period and prepare a definitive text. This remained the law for the next century.

1. The central wife [*mia klang mueang*] is a wife chosen by the parents.
2. The outer wife [*mia klang nok*] is a wife whom the husband takes as a concubine.
3. The slave wife [*mia klang thasi*] is a wife whom the husband buys from another household.

In conclusion, in didactic and religious literature, woman has only the role of wife and slave. If there be any duality in this image, it is the image of the wife and the image of the slave.

Rocking the Cradle and Wielding the Sword: the Dual Image in History

The poem from which the famous line, *Rocking the cradle and wielding the sword*, comes was dedicated to the woman warriors, *Thao Thepsatri* and *Thao Srisunthon*, of Thalang Island (now Phuket Province). During the reign of King Rama the First,⁸ the Burmese King attacked Siam, sending nine armies into the country by various routes. When one army moving through the southern province, reached Thalang Island, the Siamese governor of Thalang was very ill and unable to fight. At the last moment, his wife and her sister led the people of Thalang to against the Burmese, and they

were able to hold off the Burmese until a Siamese army arrived and helped force the enemies to retreat. Without these two women, Thalang might have fallen, and this would have imperiled Bangkok. When the war was over, the King bestowed upon the two women the titles *Thao Thepsatri* and *Thao Srisunthon*, and thus the two women, who were common people, by birth became famous heroines in Thai history.

This is one of only three significant cases in Thai history in which women became national heroines. The first was during the Ayuddhya Period when King Maha Chakkaphat⁹ fought an elephant duel against with the Burmese King. When the Siamese King was threatened, Queen *Suriyothai*, who had followed him on to the battlefield, sacrificed her life by shielding him from the thrust of enemy's weapon with her body.

The third case occurred in the Bangkok Period during the reign of King Rama III.¹⁰ Laos, which at that time was a protectorate of Siam, rebelled, and the King of Vientiane moved with his army toward Bangkok and arrived before Khorat (Nakhon Ratchasima Province). The Siamese governor of Korat, having gone to Bangkok on royal business, was unable to return in time to defend the town and the Laotian army seized Khorat and encamped there in order to gather people and provisions. During that short period, the governor's wife and other women

⁸King Rama the First (1782-1809), founder of the Chakkri Dynasty, built Bangkok and made it the capital city of Siam after the second fall of Ayuddhya in 1767 and the short reign of King Taksin of Thonburi (1767-1782).

⁹King Maha Chakkaphat ruled Ayuddhya from 1548 until the capital fell to the Burmese in 1569.

¹⁰King Rama III reigned from 1824 to 1851. A major threat early in his reign arose in 1825, only one year after his coronation, when King Anu of Vientiane rebelled.

whom the Laotians had taken to their camp to serve them, stealthily plied the enemies with liquor and then killed them, using kitchen implements as their weapons. With the help of other Thai groups in nearby provinces, they managed to survive until the Bangkok army arrived. Because of her brave deed, the governor's wife, whose name was *Mo*, was given the name *Thao Suranari* (The Brave Lady), revered as a heroine by the people of Khorat and of the nation.

In all three cases, we can see that these heroines got into the situation unintentionally. They had to fight themselves because their husbands, the actual leaders, were not in their normal position and could not perform their role as leader. However, it is also obvious that these women need not have taken the risks they did. They could have assumed the role of the ordinary woman, who is protected by men, instead of taking the role of the protector. But they made the decision to fight, and also to die if they could not defeat the enemy. They were warriors by nature and by heart, not by training or duty.

This should explain the line cited at the very beginning; '*rocking the cradle and wielding the sword.*' The first role, 'the mother' is the primary permanent role of the woman, and the second one, 'the warrior', is a temporary role. It is not wrong to conclude that, in the historical dimension, Thai society accepts the concept of a dual image of women: that of the mother and that of the warrior.

On the other hand, these extracts from history also show that society expects women to perform the role of the warrior only when a crisis occurs and men cannot

perform their usual role. Even though not stated explicitly, we can assume such an expectation since none of these heroines, or other woman, was appointed to a governorship or any other provincial administrative office. Thus, understandably, they resumed their permanent roles as governors' wives.

Since this double image of women is evident in historical literature, it is interesting to search other literary genres to see whether this dual image of women is present and how it is presented.

Warriors in Socio-Cultural Warfare: the Dual Image in Imaginative Literature

In the literature of the early Bangkok Period,¹¹ which was a continuation of that of the Ayuddhya Period, the image of woman was still based on physical beauty and other qualities. The ideal woman had to be pretty, obedient, modest and tolerant. Loyalty to her spouse was regarded as her main qualification. However, in many stories, the dual image of woman was presented. There were heroines who took the role of the warrior, but in these stories, the woman had to transform herself into a man by the help of a god or some other supernatural power, before she could perform the role of the warrior. This is similar to what the historical data has shown: that when women take the role of the warrior, they change their clothes and perhaps, their manner. After peace was

¹¹The early Bangkok Period is assumed to be from the reign of King Rama I to that of King Rama III. Following the reign of King Rama III, Thai literature received influences from Western literature and new forms began to be developed.

restored, they would resume their role as women again. Undoubtedly, there is the implication that the power or authority of the leader is attached to the role and status of a warrior, and that such authority is reserved for men only.

The great poet during the reign of King Rama III, Sunthon Phu,¹² created heroines in his famous poetic tale called *Phra Aphai Mani* who present the dual image of woman clearly and impressively. Many of his female characters performed the role and achieved the status of male leaders and warriors without having to transform themselves into men. These characters were brave warriors as well as successful leaders.

While we have this dual image of woman presented in these works, we also have another type of dual image in other literary works of the early Bangkok Period. These female characters do not fight in a war with weapons such as swords or bows and arrows, but in another kind of war: the war against the constraints of society and traditional values. Examples from some pieces of works may help clarify this type of war in which women had to fight.

In one popular poetic tale, *Sang Thong*,¹³ when *Rotchana* the seventh daughter of King Samon, was commanded by her father to choose a young man to be her spouse, she followed that command very obediently. It was a reasonable command because a woman should get married at the right age, and moreover, the command of a parent was sacred, something which a children could not ignore or distort. However, Rotchana did not satisfy her father when she chose an ugly abnormal man to be her husband. She was chastised severely and driven away from the palace. Not only her parents and family but also the whole country had sympathetic understanding for her parent when they knew the man she had chosen.

Rotchana, the nonconformist daughter, did not complain about this punishment. She accepted banishment and went to live with her husband in a small hut at the edge of the city. Her life was completely changed from that of the princess to that of the poor housewife. Rotchana humbly learned the way in which ordinary people led their lives very modestly and only hoped that one day people would discover the truth: that her husband was actually a prince who hid his brilliant looks behind superficial ugliness. She was very confident in her decision and did not ask for any opportunity to prove her choice but merely waited, and at last, her long patience was rewarded.

¹²Sunthon Phu (1786-1855) was the most famous poet who was born a commoner. He was under the royal patronage of King Rama II, who was himself an accomplished poet. Sunthon Phu was famous for his lyrical poems (*Niras*); his most famous poetic tale was *Phra Aphai Mani*, written during the reigns of King Rama III and Rama IV.

¹³*Sang Thong* is a dramatic work written by King Rama II. The story is from the jakata tale called *Suwannasang Chadok*, which is believed to be a folktale well-known among the people of Southeast Asia.

The major female character in another famous literary work, *Khun Chang-Khun Phaen*,¹⁴ was superbly beautiful, but her life was extremely pitiful and painful. Phimphilalai married her lover Phlai Kaeo but was taken away to become the wife of another rich man, her lover's rival. Her life was then torn between her first husband, who was an able, courageous, and famous warrior with great looks--a real ladies' man, and her second husband, who lacked all the qualities his rival possessed but was wealthy and loyal.

Eventually, Phimphilalai was sentenced to death by the King on the charge of indecisiveness--whether to choose the passionate love of her first husband or the faithful, modest love of her second husband. Although her guilt was not clear, society punished her, justifying itself on the grounds that she gave her heart to two men, something which no woman could be allowed to do. However, her two husbands did not have to bear the burden she did of being loyal to one's spouse. In the eyes of society, a man, unlike a woman, could give his one heart to an unlimited number of wives. No one takes into account the fact that the cause of what happened to Phimphilalai was never she herself but rather one or the other of her self-centered husbands.

The last example here is the beautiful princess Lawengwanla in *Phra Aphai Mani*, who was teased painfully by fate. She was in love with the man who was responsible for the death of her father and her brother. Lawengwanla once promised her people that she would take revenge for her father and brother, but she could not help herself because of the power of love. She tried in every way to have her lover stay with her. Her effort was successful but only for a short while. She had to give him back to his wife and his children who brought their armies to Lawengwanla's city. Lawengwanla was condemned by her own people and also suffered from the fact that she broke her vow to take revenge.

At last Lawengwanla became queen without a king and had to take care of her child without the help of its father. She had to fight alone both in the real war between the two cities and in the war in her heart, almost entirely without any moral support, not even from her child.

These women in the literature of the early Bangkok Period represented the image of ideal woman in one respect. They all were very beautiful and brilliant and were born into a high social status, either in the royal family or in a rich family. They were excellent, loyal wives who always served their husbands exactly as specified in *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*. In short, they were good examples of what society assumes and requires the ideal wife to be.

On the other hand, these women display the role of the warrior in a society in which man was the master. This second image, which contradicts the social concept of the ideal woman, appears as the underlying image in these female characters. Although there may have been

¹⁴*Khun Chang-Khun Phaen* (The Story of the Two Rivals), the most famous narrative poem of Bangkok Period, is believed to have originated from an actual real historical event in Ayuddhya Period. This impressive story of two men and one woman ending with the death of the woman was handed down orally, and the oral versions were collected and written down in the Bangkok Period.

no actual fighting as there was in the case of Lawengwanla, these women were fighting, albeit quietly, against the whole of society and its whole system of values. These literary works show that within the peaceful, conforming look of society, silent struggles always occur in various forms. Defeat or victory may not be the major point; however, the attitude of the poets, who were representatives of their society, is evident: that women in imaginative literature do not have only the beautiful image of the ideal woman, but also the underlying image of the warrior.

Woman / warrior: the Dual Image in the Novel and Short Story

In our contemporary literature, namely, the novel and the short story, the dual image of woman is presented in various dimensions. These various images can be roughly categorized into two main groups: the dual image of woman in a real war, and that of woman in a war of concepts or of value conflict.

Chanhom

In *Chanhom*,¹⁵ an anti-communist novel written by Wasit Detkunchon a very well-known police writer, the heroine whose name is the title of this novel, was a young girl who was very pretty. Her beauty as described by Wasit was almost the same as that of the ideal woman described in *Trai Phum Phra Ruang*:

Her long black hair was not permed or treated like the hair of other women in the city; it was long and soft. Her face had no cosmetics at all. Her complexion was fine and fair. Her eyebrows were black and curved. He could not see her eyes, but her eyelashes were long and curving. She was pretty even in her sleep.

and

Chanhom had all qualities which could enchant men. First, she had ideal beauty, exceeding that of other women. She possessed all ideal qualities of women such as politeness, sweetness, and modesty. She was also prim and proper.

Throughout the story, the author mentions the beauty of Chanhom and seems to be saying that such a pretty woman should not become a fighter --a warrior-- in this war, the war between the government and the communist terrorists.

He was filled with awe, wondering whether it was time for women to take up weapons and help men protect their country once again.

Phichai, the hero who was the doctor in the Air Force, went to work in the troubled area in the north-east. He wrote a letter to his friend in Bangkok after Chanhom's death in her last fight, saying that he had been in love with Chanhom since they had first met and wanted to

¹⁵*Chanhom*, a short novel written by Police Major General Wasit Detkunchon in 1971, during the period of anti-communism under Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat's regime.

marry her. But at the same time he realized that:

Chanhom had faith in her country. She strongly believed that all the problems could be resolved. She kept her faith until the last minute of her life.

Thus, while he talked about Chanhom's beauty and her womanly qualifications, he was also aware that she was a warrior. She was brave, firm, and smart. She knew exactly what she wanted to do, and she did it without hesitation. But this does not mean she had no emotion. She did love Phichai, but she was ready to devote herself to the country, that is, to fight against the country's enemies. Chanhom was trained by a special unit under the Communist Suppression Command to fight guerrilla warfare and she fought until her last breath. Her death caused Phichai to resign from his position in Bangkok and decide to stay in the north-eastern provinces to carry on Chanhom's resolution.

Chanhom obviously represents the dual image of woman in a real war. She was like those heroines in the historical documents but not as lucky as them. It is clear that, even though Phichai asked her to marry him, she would not give up her duty to her country. She possessed the beautiful image of the ideal woman and the courage of the warrior. And the author seems to be saying that the image of ideal woman and the image of the warrior can be fused into the total image of anyone who really has the faith to fight for the country.

A Woman Named Bunrot

While Chanhom wielded her gun in guerrilla warfare, Bunrot, the heroine in *A Woman Named Bunrot*,¹⁶ wielded her weapon in the war of life, the war against social and cultural values which bind women with the invisible label of second-class citizen.

Botan, the author of this novel, intentionally made her heroine ugly and even made her the opposite of the traditional 'ideal' woman. Bunrot was literate but did not have much education. Her elder sister, like many other poor girls from the rural areas, became a 'rented wife' [an American GI's mistress, a term used during the Vietnam war], and later on, a prostitute. Bunrot was sent by her mother to work as a domestic servant in the home of a rich Chinese family. When she was raped by her master, she ran away to the house of her former teacher and begged to be allowed to stay and work as a maid without pay. She learned many things from her teacher, and then started to fight in her personal war against all kinds of oppression caused by traditional values and social bias against women. It was not easy at all for a girl in such a situation, but Bunrot was clever, ambitious, and most important of all, she had strong will to fight for her faith and to prove the ability of women.

¹⁶ *A Woman Named Bunrot*, (1981) written by Botan (the pen name of Supha Luesiri Sirisingha). This novel was first published in *Satrisan Weekly Magazine* and has been made into a movie and a television drama.

Bunrot was a perfect and effective warrior on her battlefield. Step by step, she advanced toward her success. She had faith in hard-work and self-reliance: these were her weapons. Once she told her mother, "If you give money to people, you have to keep giving to them and helping them all your life. But if you push them to work, then they can help themselves." She thus, initiated a family business for her brothers and sisters.

She also applied that concept to herself and worked very industriously. When her mother told her that she should not force her younger brothers to do housework, she stoutly argued that,

"Can anyone tell for sure that this is woman's job and that is man's job? Who said that women can take only this kind of position? Women went to work in the field just like men and did all kind of work too. No one said this was a man's job and women should not do it. Women sometimes had to raise their children all by themselves without men's help. No one said this was wrong."

Thus, Bunrot taught and forced her two brothers to do housework such as cooking, cleaning clothes, and taking care of the house. Certainly, this is against the traditional values concerned the division of labour between man and woman; however, Bunrot was firm, determined and, as her mother said, sharp-tongued and hard-headed, she went on without hesitation. These qualifications she possessed are not those of the ideal

woman, nor even of the good, educated lady; they are quite the opposite.

While the author intentionally equipped Bunrot with all the qualifications appropriate to the warrior, she also bound Bunrot to certain traditional values, especially the family bond.

Bunrot was tired of all the problems; she wanted to leave everything here and stay with her American husband. She did not want to be troubled by all her relatives' problems. But when she saw her brothers' and nephews' faces, such an idea had to stop. Bunrot was not Sida, the heroine in the epic Ramayana, whom the rishi had got from ploughing the land, and she did not come out of a bamboo rod either; she was born from her mother's womb. She had sisters and brothers and was surrounded by relatives, close and distant. She used to eat with them, starve with them, how could she neglect them? If she could eat well and dress well while her mother, sisters and brothers had nothing, how could she swallow the food?

Obviously, Bunrot took the role of the ideal woman who sacrificed herself for the well-being of her family, and this is a role certainly expected of women in Thai society, both past and present.

How does Bunrot measure up as ideal wife? Bunrot married an American soldier, the chief engineer of an American airbase in Thailand during the Vietnam war. However, she would never have let him choose her; she was the one who chose him, after spending quite some time studying him to make sure he was the man she needed. She did not expect to have a rich husband or any man on whom she would be dependant, but a man whom she could respect and trust. Fortunately, her husband knew her well enough to let her live her own life and gave her only wise advice when she needed it. Thus, he was not the kind of husband whose wife has to be "a perfect housewife, who takes care of her husband and satisfies him...[and]...entertains him whenever he wants." Bunrot then once again, challenged the traditional concept of the ideal wife the same as she did the concept of the qualifications of the ideal woman.

Khu Kam

Bunrot was intended to take the role of the 'strong woman' with the underlying image of warrior. She has faith and courage to pursue her goal. However, Angsumalin, who is portrayed as a nationalist and a patriot during the World War II era, was very ignorant and did not realize that her personal war was only an imagined one. Actually, in this dramatic novel, 'popular for decades,¹⁷ with its melodramatic death

scene of the hero, the real 'strong woman' is Angsumalin's mother, On.

On was born to the family of a poor gardener. When she secretly married a young, good-looking lieutenant from an upper-class family, he could not bring her to his parents because they refused to give their consent to the marriage. When he went abroad to study and left On and her baby daughter with On's parents, On took care of herself and the baby without any help from her husband. When he returned and married another woman recommended by his family, On asked for nothing as compensation for divorce but the right to her daughter. She worked harder from that time on to bring up her daughter as best as she could, and she was very successful until trouble came during wartime. Misunderstanding and gossip forced Angsumalin, her daughter to marry a young Japanese soldier, the hero who really was in love with her.

At first, Angsumalin refused to marry and suffered from the conflicts in her heart. On encouraged her and gave her generous moral support because she herself had experienced the same feeling. Thus, she told her daughter to be strong and endure the suffering. However, the situation changed because the Japanese army wanted to exploit this personal relationship as pro-Japanese propaganda. Angsumalin's father, a Navy admiral who also worked underground with the Free Thai, was forced by the Thai government to arrange the marriage. He then came back to the family he had neglected for almost 20 years and asked for cooperation, not for himself but for the country's security. Without a doubt, the father's right over the child manifests its power, given the cultural background of the

¹⁷*Khu Kam* (1969) written by Thamayanti (the pen name of Wimon Siriphaibun) has been very famous decades and has been adapted to the cinema and television many times. The 1990 TV adaptation starring the famous singer Thongchai McIntyre in the role of the Japanese hero, Kobori, created a sensation called 'Kobori Fever.'

patriarchal family system like that of Thailand. On, who had always been strong, firm, and self-confident, resumed the traditional, permanent role of the ideal wife, giving her daughter back to the father who regained his absolute authority as the head of the family once again.

On is a very good illustration of the double image of the historical heroines. When she was the only leader of the family, she was able to shoulder her burden stoically without complaint, but as soon as her divorced husband returned, she became an ideal wife, obedient, modest, and respecting him as her master.

Nuea Nang

Phlapphla in *Nuea Nang*,¹⁸ a novel by Krisna Asoksin, is a genuine model of the modern, westernized woman and also of a woman one who fights against the slave image of woman bound by the social chains that are the requirements of traditional values. But she is an extreme case the author uses to portray the woman who transgresses the limits of social acceptability.

In this novel, Krisna put the emphasis on the norms concerning the relationship between man and woman. She discusses the active role in the courting procedures in particular, and also the problem of the decision making as well as the concept of virginity of woman before marriage. Phlapphla, her heroine, has many boyfriends with whom she has intimate

relationships. She never tries to hide these relationships, but she does not flaunt them. As a very smart and successful woman from a rich, middle-class family, she spends her personal life in the way she wants and even pursues the men she wants. At last, the author shows her own mind by punishing Phlapphla by having he be turned down by the man whom she really loves. Actually, the hero is not a traditionalist, but he cannot accept so progressive an image. Phlapphla has to accept her defeat and tries to nurse her heart quietly. The author leaves open the question in the reader's mind whether Phlapphla is going to come back with a new image of old values or with some other strategy for new warfare.

The Fifth Train Trip and A Pot Stained beyond Scraping

These two short stories, written in different periods, both portray the image of women who are bound by traditional values and also by the role of the woman as the one expected to sacrifice for the family. However, they give the different feeling to their readers.

In *The Fifth Train Trip*,¹⁹ a short story written by Atsiri Thammachot, the role conflicts of women is illustrated with seriousness and bitterness. Society expects women to serve and support their families, but the positive aspects of their submissive roles are never appreciated by society. In poor families in rural areas, especially in the North, it is very common to hear that

¹⁸*Nuea Nang* (1984) by Krisna Asoksin (the pen name of Sukanya Cholasuek), the S.E.A. Write Award novelist of 1984, for the novel *Pun Pit Thong*. Krisna is also a National Artist for Literature (1989)

¹⁹ "The Fifth Train Trip" (1977) written by Atsiri Thammachot, won the S.E.A. Write Award for short stories in 1981 for his collection *Khun Thong Chao cha Klap Muea Fa Sang* (Khun Thong Will return at Dawn)

the daughter of a family has to support her family by becoming a prostitute in a big city. Is this the only way out of poverty? The solution is not a case of material needs but a matter of life and death. However, society never respects these devoted women as heroines in the war of life, but on the contrary, their devotion is overlooked --the same as that of a slave.

Khamsoi, the young girl in this story, went to Bangkok and became a prostitute. It was not that Khamsoi nor her father did not know what she would be doing in the city. They all realized what she was doing, but the point was whether they had other choices or not. After three years, Khamsoi bought her father a water buffalo, and her sister beautiful clothes, a blanket, and so on. Other girls from her village also helped their families avoid starving and find new lives. Such a girl "...would leave her village to go out into a new world, and bring the money she earned there back to her hometown, like a downpour of rain in the dry summer."

On her trip back to visit her family, Khamsoi reads a newspaper someone left on the train:

The small headline caught her eyes: OBJECTION TO LEGALIZED PROSTITUTION FOR FEAR THAT WOMEN WILL BE MARKED BY SIN

She was puzzled and pained when she read that there was objection to legalized prostitution based the concept of sin. She could not understand how she and her friends could be sinful since they showed gratitude and did their duty to their families. They gave their families land, houses, happiness, and comfort, all of

which came from their own work. How could this be sinful? While it is true that in Buddhist tradition that great merit can be made by the ordination of a son, what merit can be gained from a daughter? Poor girls are burdened by family economic problems, but if they become prostitute, they are labelled "sinners." Society seems to be requiring new roles for women to fit new economic problems, but at the same time, it does not prescribe the roles. Women have to shoulder heavy burdens just like warriors in the battlefield; however, they never receive any medal or decoration from society.

In another painful short story, *A Pot Stained Beyond Scraping*,²⁰ the female character, whose name we do not know, is portrayed just like the defeated soldier in the eternal war of the sexist society. She should stand up and fight, but she had no guts, no courage, not even the energy of all creatures with the instinct to survive. She is like the 'living dead' and absolutely surrendered to her husband.

Because of her modesty and silence, she could not protect herself and became a coward among people all her life. She had no consciousness, no courage to get out of the house and face the dangerous fangs of all the animal-like people outside.

²⁰ "A Pot Stained Beyond Scraping" (1988) by Anchan (penname of Anchalee Wiwatchai), who won the S.E.A. Write Award for the short story in 1989. Her collection is entitled *Anyamani Haeng Chiwit* (Gems of Life)

She seemed like a crippled person with no energy to fight. She fell into distress and sorrow which she alone suffered, in the narrow world with a husband whose mind in narrower than the world.

This short story, which has been widely discussed by literary critics and the reading public, seems to show the weak side of woman, unwilling to fight against sexual bias. But, on the contrary, it encourages women to fight. By illustrating the picture of the defeated, slave-wife, it makes the reader realize the power of women, the power of all human beings.

She felt like a pig, a dog or other small animal in this house...

'Dogs and pigs are animals and human beings limit animal's freedom. They have no ability to help themselves. Her heart beat fast as she imagines this.

...But, she has hands and feet, she is capable of climbing out of her cage...

But she never did.

Conclusion

In the brief analyses of the four novels and two short stories, the dual images of woman are shown differently. The first is the dual image of Chanhom, who is really a typical model of the women warriors in history. Artistically speaking, Chanhom is very unrealistic, too idealized. But she is a warrior in the real sense. Bunrot is the

warrior in the war against the bias, constraint society. On in *Khu Kam* is actually the traditional woman warrior, like those in the poetic tales of the past, who is very modest and ready to retreat to the background as soon as the husband, the presumed leader of the family, returns to his status. Phlapphla, the modern, progressive woman, may be a little bit ahead of time and thus, has to wait until society is ready to allow a woman to take such an active, aggressive role.

These four novels seem to raise the image of warrior while playing down the image of woman as mother and wife. However, none of these novels denies the concept of the dual image. At the same time, other characters in each story make destructive comments on the dual image of the heroines. In *A Woman named Bunrot*, only a few people, her former teacher and two out of three of her brothers, were able to understand her and give her their moral support even though they did not agree with her in every situation. Her solution and the solutions of others usually tended in opposite directions, but due to her firmness and her faith, Bunrot was able to retain her resolution and proved the winner at last.

In *Khu Kam* readers are usually drawn by the emotional, dramatic love between the hero and the heroine. Then the dual image of the brave mother was overlooked. While the fake image of warrior, the patriot like Angsumalin, was widely discussed.

In the two short stories, the dual image of woman is hidden almost completely under the problem of ideological confusion. However, it is obvious that contemporary Thai literature reflects the image of

woman based on the actual status of women in society, for we can see the origin of this reflection. The fight of women workers, which for some has ended in death, be they women construction workers, women working in nightclubs, bars, massage parlours and even in whorehouses, this is the origin of these literary portrayals full of social awareness. They also stem from the feminist movement among highly educated women who ask for equal legal rights. Society does not give full support, but at the present, seems to realize better the real spirit of these women fighters. However, some traditional values still exert a strong influence in society. The child prostitutes from the North never really have free choice between the value of gratitude and that of virginity, for no matter which choice they make, society will certainly censure them for their neglect of the other, and how desperate they are and will be.

The Fifth Train Trip and *A Pot Stained Beyond Scraping* illustrate women / warriors in their eternal war. It has been this way for over a century and it seems it will never end. The dual image of a heroine such as Phlapphla might not be the appropriate model for modern women in our time. However, the image of the traditional slave-wife in the heart-rending "A Pot Stained Beyond Scraping" should not be the solution either.

Society seems to require new roles for women to fit the economic achievements of modern society, but society does not approve of such roles heartily. It puts pressure on women and lets them find their own way to solve the problems resulting from such role conflicts.

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